

BELOW THE DEAD LINE

BY SCOTT CAMPBELL.

The Case of the Missing Magnate

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suggested by the circumstances already known to him; and who, keenly realizing that his own reputation was involved in the welfare of his client, strove to fix upon the speediest and most promising line of action.

He grasped at the one clue suggesting itself, much as a drowning man grasps at a straw; and, having seized his street coat from the peg on which he had hung it, he turned abruptly to Coleman and asked:

"Anything doing, Jimmie?"

"Not at present," replied Coleman, quick to read the meaning of this change in his friend. "I'll lend you a hand in any way."

"Good enough! I've an idea I shall need you. Go along with this clerk and wait for me at Gregson's office. I'll be there in twenty minutes."

"Where are you?"

"Don't stop to question me, Jimmie, dear fellow; but get away at once," cried Boyd. "At a late hour, you see a youngish chap hanging about there, with smooth face and grayish eyes, ask him if his name is Finley. If it is, nail him and hang on till I come. I want Finley!"

The central office man nodded understandingly, and hastened away with the clerk. That Boyd already had formed some sort of a theory, Coleman had not a doubt.

Boyd dashed a line for his office boy, then hastened out, and hailed a cab.

"To the Garfield building, cable!" he cried. "And don't spare your horse." The building, mentioned was one of those down-town skyscrapers, which tower like huge obelisks above their crowded neighbors, and within five minutes Boyd was dropped at the street door. Commanding the cabbie to wait, he hastened to the elevator and learned that the parties he sought occupied a suite of offices on the top floor.

"Elevated in one sense, at least," Boyd said to himself, as the car sped upward.

Attached to the office door which he presently approached was a showy brass plate, inscribed with black letters:

METROPOLITAN PRIVATE DETECTIVE BUREAU
J. Kelp, Manager.

Still with a rather threatening gleam in the depths of his gray eyes, Boyd unceremoniously entered, and curtly greeted a tall, cadaverous young man who quickly rose from a desk near the window.

"Good morning. I'm looking for Mr. Kelp."

"Mr. Kelp—oh, that's unfortunate," said the cadaverous man, with an obsequious bow. "Mr. Kelp is in Chicago. Our assistant manager, Mr. Vogie, is here. Will he answer?"

"Yes, I will see Mr. Vogie."

"Your card?"

"No card this time. Merely say that Felix Boyd wants to see him."

"Just one moment, sir."

The cadaverous young man appeared a little startled by Boyd's brusque manner, and the latter detected his nervous change of color as he hurriedly turned and vanished into an inner office. Presently he reappeared, however, smiling graciously, and rubbing his hands.

"Mr. Vogie will see you, Mr. Boyd," said he, bowing himself aside for Boyd to enter.

A burly, well-dressed man, with a large, florid face, looked up at Boyd through a pair of bushy eyebrows, but did not rise from the desk at which he was seated. "Wasn't that a prepossessing man, and his soft voice had a rasping harshness quite in accord with his looks."

"Mr. Felix Boyd, I am told," said he. "Take a seat. What can I do for you, Mr. Boyd?"

"I wish to learn what I can about your man Finley," said Boyd, with some suavity. "No, thank you, I will not sit. I shall intrude only briefly."

"Finley—Finley?" muttered Vogie, audibly. "Oh, you must refer to young Martin Finley."

"I believe that is his name."

"Yes, yes! I didn't place it at first. Bless your heart, Mr. Boyd, he is not one of our men—that is, not one of our regulars."

"Do you mean that he is not regularly employed by you?"

"Precisely. It is only rarely that we have work for one of his years and experience. We have hired him at odd times, however; the last being—let me see—"

The cadaverous man quickly appeared at the door.

"When did we last employ Martin Finley?" he asked.

"About three months ago, sir, I think. On the Billings divorce case."

"That's do!" snapped Vogie, at which he vanished as quickly as he had appeared. "What about Finley, Mr. Boyd? Nothing wrong with Finley, is there? Has he referred you to us?"

"Well, not exactly," smiled Boyd.

"Still, since I am here, I would like to ask if you consider him quite trustworthy?"

"Yes, perfectly so," Vogie promptly declared, with a nod of his ponderous head. "As square as a brick, Mr. Boyd. Cannot say much for his ability, for he is young, but his honesty—there's no question about that."

"A remarkably positive opinion coming from one who at first could not even recall Finley's name," reasoned Boyd dispassionately, as he bowed himself out after thanking his informant.

"I'm blessed if I quite fancy that joint, despite the fine furnishings and an aspect of eminent respectability."

Instead of hurrying away, Boyd lingered in the corridor for a few moments, and presently he heard the distant tinkle of a telephone bell, evidently from one of the inner rooms of the private detective bureau.

"Communicating with somebody, eh? That's about what I suspected," he grimly muttered. "Now for Gregson's office, and for Finley! This is a decidedly fine-spun thread. I'm blessed if it isn't. Yet it's a thread worth following—where goes?"

It was precisely half-past 9 when Boyd arrived at the office of Gregson & Green, where he found the clerks in confusion and Green in a state of mind bordering on distraction.

"I've seen nothing of Finley," Coleman whispered to Boyd when the latter entered.

"Unless I am off the track, Jimmie, he'll presently show up," Boyd quickly replied, with a significant wink. "In which case leave him entirely to me. Got a disguise with you?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Go out and get 'into it. Then wait on the curbing opposite the street door. Watch for any one that I may give you."

"Trust me for that, Felix."

Coleman nodded, and presently withdrew, while Boyd hastened to relieve the impatience of Gregson's partner,



"WHAT ARE YOU AFRAID OF, GREGSON?" HE ASKED.

and learn what he knew of the latter's mysterious absence.

It appeared that Gregson lived in Ravenswood, where he long had owned and occupied a fine old mansion, having a park and quite extensive grounds along the bank of the river.

His household comprised only his wife and a maiden sister, and two female servants. He had dined at home as usual the previous evening, after which he had gone alone to his boat house, intending to row about on the river until dusk, his habitual recreation at that hour when the weather permitted. He had not, however, since leaving his dwelling that evening, been seen by any of his inmates.

The circumstances under which his absence was not discovered until the next morning were not at all extraordinary. Gregson occupied a chamber apart from that of his wife, and he had, during his recent stress of business, frequently worked nearly all night in his library on the ground floor. At dusk the previous evening a servant had lighted the library lamp as usual, and then closed the door of the room. At 9 o'clock the family had retired, under the impression that Gregson had returned home and was at work in the library.

Next morning, after preparing breakfast, the servant had found the library lamp still burning, and at once spread the alarm. A search quickly revealed that Gregson had not occupied his chamber, nor had he returned from the river. His light overcoat was found lying on the boat house floor, and his boat, an ordinary lay-stroke rowboat, was missing. Despite his skill as a boatman, the evidence strongly indicated that some accident had befallen Gregson, and that he had been drowned. Vainly hoping that her husband had left his boat somewhere, however, and returned to his office in the city, a possibility suggested by the important business then engaging him, Mrs. Gregson had hurriedly telephoned the starting facts to Mr. Green, who had arrived early that morning at the firm's office.

It took Felix Boyd several minutes to get the details of the case, which certainly would have presented to most men nothing of a very encouraging nature. Yet Boyd's forceful countenance took on an expression of ugly determination while he listened, which was vividly in contrast with the ghastly perturbation and dismay of Gregson's partner.

"What did you advise Mrs. Gregson to do about the case?" Boyd quickly demanded, upon learning the facts mentioned.

"I told her to do absolutely nothing until after I had consulted you," Green excitedly rejoined.

"Very good. Glad you did so."

"I sent you after you at once. I since have been on retires. In fact, Mr. Boyd, I am almost distracted. This calamity could not have occurred at a worse time, for our business is fatal."

"Stop a bit!" Boyd sharply interrupted. "You must command your feelings and leave the investigation of the affair to me. No more of this excitement, sir. You must do just what I advise, and do it promptly."

"I cannot listen to any butts, Mr. Green," cried Boyd decisively. "First of all, telephone again to Mrs. Gregson and command her to suppress all of the facts until I arrive at her house. I presently will go over there. Tell her to give no publicity to the case, mind you, and not to inform the local police of any of the circumstances. If I am not mistaken—ah, yonder is a party I have been expecting!" To the telephone, Mr. Green, and see that my instructions are rigidly followed. I'll return in just a moment."

Boyd was not a man to be resisted at such a time. Through the glass panels of the office doors he suddenly had observed, in the public corridor outside, the same young man about whom he had questioned Gregson nearly a month before. Leaving Green to carry out his instructions, Boyd hastened out to the corridor, where Finley then was gazing anxiously toward the banker's office. Strange to relate, the last sign of austerity had vanished from Felix Boyd's face, and it now wore an inviting smile.

"Ah, you're just the chap I've been looking for," he cried heartily, as he emerged to the corridor. "Your name is Finley, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir," admitted Finley, apparently somewhat startled. "What do you want? Has anything happened to—Mr. Gregson? I have been looking—"

"Been looking after him for some time—yes, yes, I know all about that," Mr. Finley, Boyd quickly interrupted, in accents of hearty approval. "Gregson told me about you nearly a month ago. I'm mighty glad to see you at just this time. I've even been to your detective bureau in the hope of finding you there. I saw Mr. Vogie, who speaks very highly of you. Yes, yes, something has happened to Gregson, and you are the one man from whom I hope to get some sort of a clue."

"But what has happened—what has happened?" Finley now hurriedly inquired. "Did you really go to the detective bureau after me? I am employed there only at odd times, sir, and it's three months since I did any work for them. What has happened to Mr. Gregson?"

The several questions were glibly asked, and with a display of nervous anxiety that ordinarily would have passed for genuine; yet a certain crafty and treacherous light in the depths of Finley's eyes, despite the general frankness of his youthful face, did not escape the keen discernment of the

watching Gregson's house, and I did not fancy their looks, so I hid back of a wall and watched them."

"Good for you, Finley. What followed?"

"After half an hour or so," added Finley glibly, "both men crossed the park near Gregson's house, and stole cautiously down to his boat house on the bank of the river."

"Aha!" exclaimed Boyd. "Plainly they knew where and when they could catch him alone. They previously had been watching him."

"That was just my idea, sir," declared Finley, as if pleased with Boyd's approval. "First I thought I ought to inform Mr. Gregson, but before I could make up my mind to do so I saw him leave his house by the rear door and hasten down to the boat house. I then was at some distance, so could not speak to him."

"I see," nodded Boyd. "Go on."

"I then feared that some violence might be intended, the boat house being quite removed from the dwelling and nearly hidden by the trees, so I stole through the park to a position enabling me to see what occurred."

"Capital! Continue."

"Mr. Gregson saw the two men wait-

ing on the boat, and appeared to recognize them, which rather dismayed my fears. He went down to the boat, and for nearly half an hour the three men stood there, talking quite excitedly."

"Could you hear what each said?"

"Not a word, sir. I was too far away, and I dared not approach for fear of being discovered."

"What did you infer from their actions, Mr. Finley?" Boyd earnestly inquired. "Surely some sign or gesture must have suggested the nature of their altercation, if such it was."

"That's just what it appeared to be, Mr. Boyd," cried Finley, blind to the keen gleam in Boyd's searching eyes. "Mr. Gregson, moreover, appeared greatly distressed by what was said to him. Several times he covered his face with his hands, and twice he pointed wildly to the river, as if he intimated that suicide, at least, was left him, to which he would resort if they persisted in—"

"Oh, my God!" groaned Green, who was listening in ghastly dismay. "It can't be possible that—"

"Hush!" commanded Boyd, impatiently. "Hear all that Mr. Finley can impart. By Jove! young man; it's dead luck you turned up here at just this

front and did not come out—that is, sir, unless they used a rear door."

"I follow you, Finley. And then?"

"Then, sir, I decided to wait until this morning, thinking that Gregson would come into town as usual. When he failed to show up at half-past 9, I began to fear that I had missed him, or that something had happened, so I came here to learn if he had arrived. Then you suddenly came out and—"

"And accosted you, eh?" interrupted Boyd, vigorously rubbing his hands. "I see—I begin to see it all. And you, Finley, have done some excellent work. You have given me a clue that is well worth having. Now one thing more, Finley, do follow. Can you guide me to the saloon into which the two men disappeared?"

"Easily, sir, if you really wish it," cried Finley, with a readiness by no means lost to Felix Boyd.

"But what's to be done—my God! what's to be done?" Green now demanded, well-nigh in tears. "I cannot believe that Gregson has done away with himself. He can have had no occasion. Surely something else must have befallen him. There is a mystery here not explained in that way. Heaven help me, Boyd, what am I to do? It is nearly 10 o'clock, when the stock

market will open. If Gregson is not on the floor as usual—"

"Northern Traction will fall with a crash, eh?" Boyd sharply interrupted.

"With a crash—God above, even that is the fate of Northern Traction. Mark me! you must do what I command—and do it promptly! You must peg Northern Traction and hold it! In return—mark me, Mr. Green, before the market closes I will have Gregson on the floor of the exchange!"

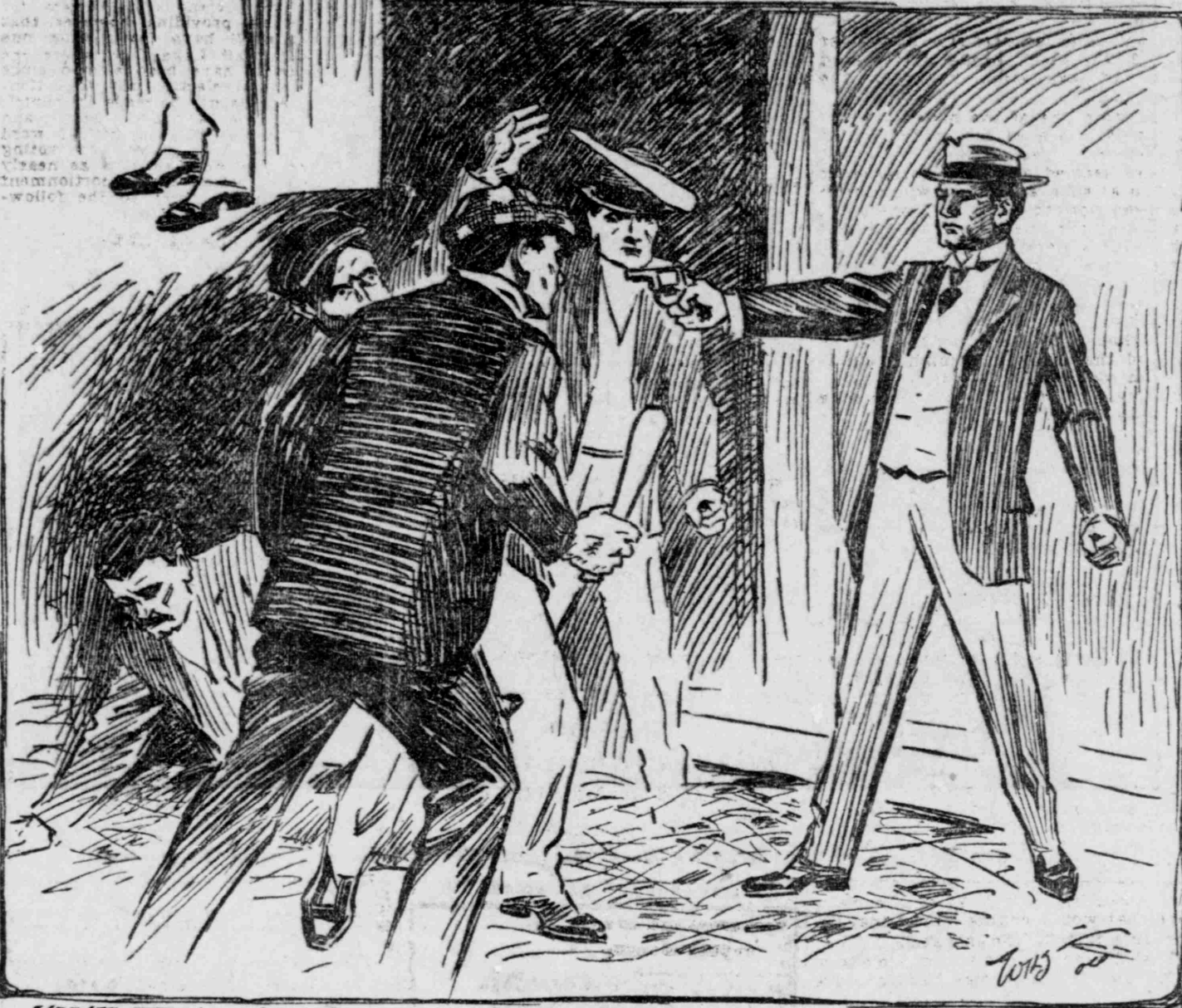
The declaration was a startling one. It rang from Boyd's lips with a violence that thrilled every nerve of his hearers. He stood with his clenched hand uplifted, with his impassioned face sternly drawn and determined, and his thin lips quivering like those of a thoroughbred in the heat of a race. Yet his glowing eyes did not lose the momentary change that swept over Finley's features, the look of a man indescribably amazed and perplexed by the declaration he had heard.

As for Gregson's partner, knowing Boyd as he did, he started up like a man electrified with sudden hope.

"Good heavens, Boyd, if you can accomplish that," he cried excitedly, "I can support the stock until afternoon, surely, and prevent a panic."

"You have my word for it," cried Boyd fervently. "Finley has given me the one clue I required. With Finley to help me, I will do just what I have stated. Look lively, then, for it's nearly 10. Do your part, Green, and I swear that I'll do mine. To the exchange! To the exchange—and leave identified with its interests."

Continued on Page 7.



"NAIL HIM! NAIL HIM, YOU FOOLS!" FINLEY FIERCELY CRIED.

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